

Developing Your Course Syllabus

As with face-to-face courses, your online course syllabus should convey information students need throughout the semester including course structure, assignments, and grading criteria. The syllabus sets the tone for the course, establishes the expectations you have for your students, and articulates University and instructor policies.

How is an Online Syllabus Different from a Face-to-Face Syllabus?

In face-to-face courses, you have multiple opportunities to answer questions about the syllabus. You do not have similar opportunities in online courses.

Take time to develop clear

- Course objectives;
- Descriptions and guidelines for assignments and their assessment;
- Course calendar;
- Grading policies — rubrics are particularly helpful and may reduce the time spent on assessment;
- Communication expectations – how you expect to communicate with students, and how quickly will you get back to them.

Add sections that explain

- Technology requirements so that students can make sure that they have adequate equipment and software to succeed in the course;
- Guidelines for online posting and etiquette (netiquette);
- Policies about collaborative work and discussions.



Essential Elements of an Online Syllabus

Here is a checklist for creating your online syllabus. You needn't include all of these items (some may be more appropriate for one class than others), nor do you have to include them all in one document called a "syllabus."

- Course title, authors' and instructor's names.
- Course instructor's contact information, plus contact information for technical support.
- Course description, perhaps the same as the description used for a course catalog listing, but more detailed; should list any prerequisites or special technical requirements for the course.
- Course objectives or expected outcomes; what students can expect to learn by completion of the course.
- Required texts or materials: any books or other materials, such as software, not made available through the learning management system but required for the course.
- Explanation of grading criteria and components of total grade: a list of all quizzes, exams, graded assignments, and forms of class participation, with grade percentages or points; criteria for a passing grade; policies on late assignments.
- Participation standards: minimum number of postings per week in discussion boards, wikis, journals or other forums and any standards for quality of participation.
- Explanation of course geography and procedures: how the online course is organized; how students should proceed each week to complete class activities; how to label assignments; where to post materials in the course.
- Plan for your students to follow should Moodle go down for maintenance or other LMS interruption. Consider how your students can reach you if they are having trouble accessing course information or submitting assignments. For example, your strategy may include creating a Dropbox or other cloud service where students can submit their assignments.
- Access to student support and acceptable documentation should students encounter LMS problems. For example, you may instruct students to take a screen shot of the specific screen that is causing them problems to document the issue and forward to the UTEP Help Desk.
- Week-by-week schedule: topics, assignments, readings, quizzes, activities, and web resources for each week, with specific dates.



- A statement on plagiarism.

- A statement on accommodations for disabled students.

Whether your course calendar is a separate document or included with your syllabus, be sure to also include the CRN and starts and end dates for the course.

It's difficult to anticipate every issue that may arise during the class and to address that in your syllabus. Your syllabus must balance brevity and completeness. Remember that you have other means of communicating detailed information to your students. You may use announcements, weekly e-mails, or postings in an appropriate forum. You will also want to use these means to reinforce important elements of your syllabus as the course progresses.